

Hobbies

Sorry, just be glad your dollar's worth \$1

By Roger Boye

Today's column answers questions from Chicago Tribune readers.

Q—I've discovered a \$1 bill that's missing the tiny number that normally appears in the upper left corner (such as "E4" or "B2"). How much might this misprint be worth?

H.N., Elgin

A—Just \$1. Your "greenback" was printed on Uncle Sam's new web press, which uses a cylinder and continuous roll of paper in making millions of \$1 bills every week. Treasury officials have eliminated the so-called "plate location numbers" from such money.

Federal Reserve notes produced on traditional sheet-fed presses will continue to carry the tiny numbers.

Q—Is there a product I can buy to clean coins found in the earth so that they have some collector value? I'm aware that cleaning coins detracts from value. But is it possible by limited cleaning to give the coins at

least some worth as collectibles?

J.B., Baraboo, Wis.

A—As you suggest, many people all but ruin old coins by trying to clean them. Even rarities cleaned by experts usually sell at lower prices.

Still, some hobbyists attempt to remove dirt and grime from unearthed coins by soaking the items in vinegar overnight, while others use mild soaps, baking soda or "coin dips" that are sold in some hobby shops. If you try any of these, first experiment on common-date coins so that you don't destroy a more valuable specimen.

Q—What do you know about the "official" Elvis Presley proof with one ounce of silver? Is it a coin? The Washington Mint is charging \$32 for the "historic silver piece" plus a first-day-of-issue commemorative stamp.

B.T., Urbana

A—The silver proof is a privately issued medal, not a government coin. For your money, you'd get about \$3.50 worth of metal, a 29 cent Elvis stamp and

a fancy envelope. The item might have some additional value as a collectible.

Q—Is paper money stamped "The Japanese Government" and "Fifty Centavos" worth anything? Why are the words in English?

P.T., Carol Stream

A—During World War II, Japan issued a variety of paper money for the territory it occupied, including bills denominated in pesos and centavos for the Philippines, which had been a U.S. commonwealth. The 50 centavos note retails for less than 40 cents today, even if in uncirculated condition. Such bills are common, in large part because many U.S. soldiers brought them home as souvenirs.

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Questions about coins or paper money? Send your queries to Roger Boye, Room 400, Chicago Tribune, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60611. Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you want a personal reply and allow at least three weeks for the answer.